

RUSSIA AND THE WEST IN IRAN

the downfall of Reza Shah the masses became more conscious politically and more easily excitable. Mobs attacked and burned the residence of Qavain Saltaneh in December, 1942. Mobs demonstrated at the time of the oil crisis in 1944. Workers in textile factories or in the Teheran silo influenced events by their strikes. A good slogan, a clever word, might have kindled the imaginations of these people and prompted them to action. And it was the press that was the carrier of words. Thus, despite the weakness of individual newspapers as contrasted with the strength of such traditional groups as the aristocracy, the bazaar merchants, the Court, the army, or the clergy, the press as an entity had to be reckoned with. The sensitivity of the government to the editorials, the frequent suspensions and legal restrictions—all these factors testified that the government of Iran did not fail 'realistically to appraise the importance of the press. And there is evidence that foreign Powers also fully realized its significance and potentialities.

To sum up these observations on the position of Iran during the war period, one may say that between 1941 and 1945 the country passed through a state of ferment. With regard to foreign policy, her freedom of movement was limited. In this respect Iran was compelled to adopt a passive attitude for fear of further blows at her independence. Internally the lack of strong leadership was felt as an aftermath of dictatorship. Democratic tendencies were clearly visible, but the time was hardly propitious for the development of democracy. The presence of foreign troops in the country had an upsetting effect on economic life and permitted free exercise of

foreign intrigue.
There was danger that the political ambitions of
various groups
might be channeled into the wrong direction and
that Iran might
deviate from the necessary road of reform. There was
danger also that
the country might be deprived entirely of her
sovereignty. In short,
the destiny of Iran ceased to be shaped by the
Iranians alone. The
rivalry of the Big Powers and their diplomatic and
military activities
constituted the main substance of political life
during this stormy
period. This rivalry, however, was conducted in an
Iranian setting,
and, therefore, what the Iranians did or did not do
was not alto-
gether without effect on the course of history.

[192]